

**Rockville Cemetery**  
**1350 Baltimore Road**  
**Rockville, MD 20850**  
**Established 1738.**

Owner: Rockville Cemetery Association  
Nominated by Peerless Rockville  
History updated by Carol Duvall and Eileen McGuckian

**Summary:**

The history of Rockville Cemetery links the settlement period of this area to the present time. Records document nearly 270 years of continuous use of this site. Initiated as a colonial burying ground associated with a Chapel of Ease established by Prince George Parish (Anglican Church) in 1738, since 1880 the property has been owned by the Rockville Cemetery Association, which built the Superintendent's house. In addition to being the community's oldest burying ground, the property is significant as an example of the rural cemetery movement as well as for the many individuals prominent in Rockville and Montgomery County history who are buried here. The grounds have been enlarged and modernized over time, but the original two-acre site and some of the earliest gravesites are extant.



**Description:**

The Rockville Cemetery is located adjacent to the Rockville Civic Center property to the north and Baltimore Road to the south and is bisected by a City-owned 1.8209-acre strip of land following Little Falls Branch from Baltimore Road to the Civic Center. (See Map, Attachment 7.2) Avery Road is the west boundary and an apartment complex the east boundary. The cemetery is in two sections. The older west section, accessed from Avery Road, is comprised of 7.7 acres in three parcels. The east 16.87-acre newer section is adjacent to a circular private road accessed from Baltimore Road at the east and west ends. Geographically, the cemetery lies on the stream banks along Little Falls Branch with the highest elevation, 419 feet, on Avery Road, dropping to 300 feet at the stream and climbing back to 370 feet at the east property line.



The older section is laid out in a series of terraces with a "U" shaped macadam drive from top to bottom connected by drives and grassed walkways. Concrete stairs from the drives provide access to the terraces. Mature hardwood trees of champion size shade the walks and drive, and tall evergreens recall the 19th century tradition of living memorials. Broken stretches of a 19th century iron fence remain in poor repair along Avery Road. The newly resurfaced Avery Road appears to be very near, or perhaps even covering, some of the gravesites.



The character of the old section of the cemetery is varied. Although its use as religious chapel and church yard dates to 1738, its continuous use and subdivision into family plots has placed pre-Revolutionary, federal, and Victorian stones next to recently carved crisp polished marble. Decorative iron fencing encloses some of the family plots, others by granite or cement curbing, some by boxwood edgings. Prominent family markers with smaller individual stones mark other family plots. The burial sites are not organized in a strict



gridwork, but almost in a patchwork fashion within and without the family plot structure. The memorials themselves vary from a 1752 four-inch thick stone decorated with carved tassel and drape, hourglass and skull and crossbones, to simple inscribed tombstones, tall Victorian obelisks, broken columns and urns, to elaborate free-standing stone crypts and mortuary temples with stained glass windows and brass grillwork. Vandalism is evident in ornaments broken from bases and overturned tombstones, but the cemetery placement well back from the road and the presence of an on-site caretaker has reduced its incidence.





### Caretaker's House



The caretakers are housed in a symmetrical 2 1/2 story, frame vernacular Victorian house located just inside the entrance from Avery Road. Sited on a steep hill, the house faces north, fronting on the cemetery with the south, or rear portion of the fieldstone foundation above grade. The 1889 house has a side-gabled rectangular east-west rear portion with a front gabled wing, (or stem) forming a "T" shape. A one-story veranda wraps around the three sides of the stem. The cross-gable roof is covered with composition shingles and there are two brick interior chimneys in the rear east-west portion. The exterior, including cornerboards, cornice, and any decorative sidings, has been clad with vinyl siding and the shutters removed, although the turned wooden porch

posts remain. Two outbuildings are west of the house.

The west façade is composed of the west gabled end and the stem of the "T". There are small square ventilator panels at all gable peaks. The west gable end has a pair of windows centered on the second story, another pair centered on the first story, and one window in the exposed foundation. The north side of the gable end has an exterior door on the first story, and one window is centered on the first story of the stem.

The north (front) gabled end has a pair of windows centered on the second story and a pair centered on the first story.

The east gabled end has two windows evenly spaced on the second story and a pair of windows on the first story. An exterior door is on the north side, first story, of the east gable, and one window is centered on the first story of the stem.

The three-bay south (rear) facade has an unrelieved second story. The first story has one window in each bay. The exposed basement foundation has an attached shed-roofed porch with a cement floor. Two square wood posts connected by a plain stick and rail balustrade support the porch roof on the west half. There is one window in the west bay and a flush-mounted modern exterior door in the center bay. Vertical siding encloses the east bay of the porch with a wood panel exterior door on its west side.



### Outbuildings



Two frame garden and utility sheds are located a distance east and south of the house. Both face north. The larger one is square with a fieldstone foundation, which is exposed on the south and clad with German siding. It has a flared-eave hipped pyramidal roof covered with patterned tin shingles.

The house and outbuildings are in a state of disrepair with much debris and equipment surrounding the area near these buildings. Since the removal of heavy construction equipment, which until recently was located on the grounds, there appears to be much debris left in its wake on the west end of the grounds, near Avery Road.

Avery Road itself appears to be encroaching on some of the actual burial sites at that end. In the lower (newer) section of the cemetery grounds, old tires and other trash have been dumped. The cemetery grounds are in deteriorated condition and in need of general clean up.

### Significance

The history of Rockville Cemetery links the settlement period of this area to the present time. Records document nearly 270 years of continuous use of this site. Initiated as a colonial burying ground associated with a Chapel of Ease established by Prince George Parish (Anglican Church) in 1738, since 1880 the property has been owned by the Rockville Cemetery Association, which built the Superintendent's house. In addition to being the community's oldest burying ground, the property is significant as an example of the rural cemetery movement as well as for the many individuals prominent in Rockville and Montgomery County history who are buried here. The grounds have been enlarged and modernized over time, but the original two-acre site and some of the earliest gravesites are extant.

## **History and Support**

The Anglican Church formed the new parish of Prince George's in 1726, to serve the inhabitants of the rapidly growing northern and western parts of Prince George's County.<sup>1</sup> The 1719 chapel at the mouth of Rock Creek (Later Georgetown) was named the Parish Church by a vote of 49 to 26 on August 13, 1728. The minority parish members considered this chapel site too inconvenient and began a subscription for building a church "in the upper part of the parish."<sup>2</sup>

Land for this new chapel, the site of the present Rockville Cemetery, was first mentioned in the Vestry records of July 23, 1738, when the vestry resolved:

"That a memorandum should be made that as Mr. Thomas Williams was so kind as to offer two acres of land being part of land called Mill Land for the building of a Chappell on that the Vestry accepts the same."<sup>3</sup>

The land patent "Mill Land" had been granted to Edward Dawson in 1724. Lying "at the head of a glade on a branch of Rock Creek," it was approximately one mile northeast of what became the center of Rockville. Thomas Williams of the plantation "Three Sisters" (in Prince George's County) leased this site for a water mill by 1731, and in 1734, purchased the entire 164-acre tract from the Dawsons.<sup>4</sup>

Church histories and vestry records for the next decade document both the enlargement and completion of the parish church at Rock Creek and the beginnings of the new Rock Creek Chapel. The similarity in name and scarcity of details has resulted in some confusion in dating construction stages of these buildings. Both the vestry records and church historians writing in the mid-19th century are silent on the exact beginning of the chapel/cemetery site, but entries from the contemporary documents can be placed in context. (Appendix A, attached) sets out the available information chronologically, giving some idea of size, architectural detail and materials used in these 18th century buildings, and the development of the "Chappell Yard" -- the cemetery. A small building constructed of weatherboarded planks and lop shingled roof was in operation by 1744. It was probably erected in 1734 when an assessment was made "toward building a new church," for by 1744, the General Assembly acted "to name the Chappell, a Chappell of Ease and the former Church the Parish Church."

In 1751 Thomas Nicholls contracted to build a fence around the Chapel Yard, to measure 100 by 96 feet with two gates four feet wide "as it is in the church." Charles Haymond was hired to "grubb the yard and to clear the trees all out of same and to fell the trees for 15 feet distant all around the laid railles."<sup>5</sup>

The earliest extant grade marker now in the cemetery was located within this yard. Long time vestryman John Harding was born in 1685, and buried at this site in 1752.<sup>6</sup> Harding was one of the original 26 petitioners for the new chapel; his descendants would occupy the Harding lands directly opposite the cemetery site until the 20th century.<sup>7</sup> The Harding grave marker is a weathered stone, carved with skull and crossbones and an hourglass motif. Its primitive carvings contrast with nearby modern monuments of finely carved Italian marble and polished brown stone.

In 1753, the vestry voted to set up a system to record births, marriages, and burials of parish members.<sup>8</sup> However, no documentation exists for the earliest burials. Many of the earliest gravesites still extant mark the graves of families allied to Williams and other nearby plantation owners. The names of the Beattys, Clagetts, Hillearys, O'Neals, Owens, and Bealls are a roll call of early families in the area.

In 1754, a 20 by 20-foot addition was made to the "backside" of the chapel, along with an eight-foot entry porch. The addition was to be weatherboarded and planked "as laid in the original chapel" and the roof was to be shingled with "good white oak or cypress shingles." Later the entire building was raised another nine inches, stone foundations were laid and another 20-foot square addition enlarged the building.

From 1734 to 1837, the Mill Land tract surrounding the chapel/cemetery site remained the property of the Williams family. The last half of the 18th century saw the vicinity, especially around the nearby crossroads, develop into an infant community. The chapel bordered the road to Rock Creek Bridge. Other roads led to the market centers, of George Town or Frederick, to the mill sites on creeks and to the other church, the Presbyterian Meeting House at Captain John, generating social and commercial settlement of the area. One of the Thomas Williams' grandsons, William Prather Williams, laid out town lots around the courthouse when this crossroads became the county seat of the new Montgomery County. First platted as "Williamsburg," it was later renamed Rockville.

The original chapel was replaced by a new brick, two-story building between 1802 and 1808. By 1817, Rockville was well established and the replacement building "unsuitable for worship," so the congregation agreed to move into town. The brick church was torn down, and some materials reused in the construction of a new church on Washington Street. (See survey site M: 26/11/11).<sup>9</sup> The various enlargements and demolition of the chapel buildings in the cemetery make the precise location of the original chapel difficult to pinpoint, although in 1894, the Ladies Auxiliary of the Cemetery Association announced that they had uncovered the foundation stones of the earliest chapel. These foundations are no longer in evidence.<sup>10</sup>

Richard Johns Bowie purchased "Mill Land" and other parcels north of the Baltimore Road in 1837.<sup>11</sup> His estate, Glen View, was in sight of the cemetery. In 1877, a new road was cut through the property and the cemetery's western boundary fronted on this road, this road ran from Baltimore Road to Muncaster Mill Road, past Horner's Mill at Rock Creek from which it took its name. Horner's Mill Road is now called Avery Road.<sup>12</sup>

The cemetery owned by Christ Church remained in general use, although Catholics and Baptists had their own burying grounds by the 2nd quarter of the 19th Century. Many families had their own small plots on their lands, but by 1860, the cemetery was so crowded that the Vestry resolved that no more burials could take place without consent of the Rector and vestrymen and only after public notice in the newspaper.

The general conditions and lack of maintenance at the cemetery grounds were so bad by 1873 that they prompted an editorial in the *Montgomery County Sentinel* in which the cemetery "Where the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep" was termed "not an inviting spot." The *Sentinel* mentioned the sandstone tombstone of another Harding, "Henry Harding, died March, 1773," but not the grave of his father, John.<sup>13</sup> (See attached)

Establishment of a community cemetery in Rockville coincided with the desire of the Vestry of Christ Episcopal Church to reverse the ravages time had taken in the old burial ground. In an article published in the *Sentinel*, local citizens had discussed the concept of a public cemetery prior to the Civil War, but took no action until 1880.<sup>14 15</sup> In that year, Judge Richard Johns Bowie donated five acres of land to the Vestry, which deeded the cemetery to the newly incorporated Rockville Cemetery Association. The Association was formed to lay out and maintain "a public cemetery for the burial of all persons, irrespective of religious denominations." The original Board of Directors, all prosperous, well- respected men, included William Veirs Bouic, Jr. and David H. Bouic (Baptists), E.B. Prettyman and Dr. E. E. Stonestreet (Methodists), Hezekiah Trail (Christian), James B. Henderson (Presbyterian), and several Episcopalians, including Judge Bowie.

The neglected cemetery's future brightened with new stewardship. In 1889, the Association contracted with local carpenter William Reuben Pumphrey "to build a tenant house within the enclosure of Rockville Cemetery, the building to be a comfortable structure ... to be occupied by a man who will have general supervision of the grounds."<sup>16</sup> In 1890, Judge Bowie's widow, Catharine Bowie, added two more acres, making a total of nine acres. Visible improvement came four years later, when the board appointed an Executive Committee composed of women. Under the leadership of Mrs. Rebecca T. Veirs, the Rockville



Union Cemetery Society cleared the grounds, planted trees and transformed the burying ground "from a veritable wilderness into a spot of unusual beauty." <sup>17</sup>

The builder of the house is buried within a large mausoleum with granite urns and stained glass windows. William R. Pumphrey was the second generation of local carpenters and undertakers. His father, William E. Pumphrey, died in 1887 and is buried nearby. Later generations of Pumphreys specialized in the mortuary side of the business and ceased to be known as carpenters.

Rockville Cemetery is a stunning example of the rural cemetery movement. This concept began in large Eastern American cities in the 1830s as a reaction to space and sanitation issues as well as the disruption caused by growth. Influenced by cemetery architects and landscape gardeners, the movement filtered down to small towns such as Rockville as a picturesque, safe burial ground, which symbolized community unity. Curving roads, attractive plantings, three-dimensional monuments, as isolated yet accessible location and family-controlled plots carried out the rural cemetery philosophy. <sup>18</sup>

Two more acres were added to the cemetery land in 1890, donated by Catharine Holland Williams Bowie, widow of Judge Bowie. (See Plat 21 d, attached.) Both the Bowies, along with many of the town's 19th century citizens, are buried here. In 1897, 16 bodies were reentered here after their removal from the Baptist Cemetery in Rockville, due to the road realignment and development around Falls Road and Montgomery Avenue.

The Cemetery Association purchased an additional 16.18-acre parcel of land east of the original site in 1933. <sup>19</sup> Most of the modern burials are on this acreage. Through the years, Rockville Cemetery continued to expand, and the adjacent farmland was developed into residential and institutional uses. Purchases, gifts, and exchanges increased the acreage in 1898, 1933, 1938, and 1969. The property was annexed into the City of Rockville in 1984. Rockville Cemetery remains an active non-denominational community burying ground.

The roster of persons buried at Rockville Cemetery reads like a Who's Who of Montgomery County and Rockville. As examples, Upton Beall and E. B. Prettyman (Clerks of the Court), Walter "Big Train" Johnson (baseball great and County Commissioner), Judge and Mrs. Richard Johns Bowie (who lived next door), the Pumphrey family (carpenters and undertakers), veterans from the revolutionary, Civil, Spanish-American, Korean, and Vietnam Wars, and World Wars I and II, and (from 1940 until 1975) author F. Scott Fitzgerald and (from 1948) Zelda Fitzgerald. The earliest remaining stone marker is that of John Harding (1685-1752), long-time vestryman and owner of a nearby farm.

Asphalt paths and roads with pebbled concrete curbing now wind beneath the towering trees on the original part of the cemetery. Around the perimeter of the older section, some portions of the 19th century ornamental iron fencing remain. The final resting-places for generations are marked by various styles of grave markers and monuments; some of the family groupings cover more than a hundred years of family lines.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> The volume containing The Records of Prince George's Parish bears the date 1726 on its cover, but the vestry records begin with the 1719 list of subscribers for building the chapel at Rock Creek (later St. Paul's, Georgetown). These vestry records were used for most of the extant church histories; the microfilmed copy was used for this form (Reel #1 77 at Rockville Public Library).

<sup>2</sup> Ethan Allen, History of Prince George's Parish, Montgomery County (1860-61). Maryland Historical Society manuscript Collection, Manuscript #376, p.7 and vestry records for August 1728.

<sup>3</sup> Prince George's County Land Records T/1 09 (1734) (Dawsons to Thomas Williams) and Prince George's County Debt Books.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. George Murdoch was paid 36 pounds of tobacco for recording the deed November 30, 1738, at Prince George's County Land Records T/673.

<sup>5</sup> Vestry Records 1751.

<sup>6</sup> Harding family information is found in genealogies, wills, plat and Land Records. John Harding's Will approved 5 February 1752, is recorded at Frederick County Will Book A, folio 74 '-75.

<sup>7</sup> During the 19th century, the Harding lands lay on the south side of Baltimore Road, and most of the Hardings were Catholic. Catherine Jane Harding Maddox, (b. 1824) donated part of her farm to St. Mary's for the expansion of the Catholic cemetery, directly opposite the gates to the Rockville Cemetery. The southern portion of Harding/Maddox land is the later subdivision of "Janeta." (Family Histories and Montgomery County Land Records.)

<sup>8</sup> One of John Harding's grandsons was Robert Owen, who was also the nephew of local tavern keeper Lawrence Owen. Robert Owen contracted with the vestry to build the vestry room addition. (See Appendix A).

<sup>9</sup> No records of the vestry for 1773-1790 exist. After the Revolution the American branch of the Church of England adopted the name Protestant Episcopal Church; Rock Creek Chapel became Christ Church.

<sup>10</sup> A short history of the cemetery and church is given in the "Constitution and By-Laws of the Rockville Cemetery Association." This undated brochure, apparently written in the early 20th century, includes the mention of 1894 events. Maude Wilson Betts' 1975 church history, "Piscataway to Prince George's parish," includes a photo of the vicinity.

<sup>11</sup> Land and Tax Records 1777-1887, Plats and history of "Glen View." Survey M: 26/17/1.

<sup>12</sup> Plat recorded at Montgomery County Land Records EBP16/380. The 1879 Hopkins Atlas shows this new road.

<sup>13</sup> Montgomery County Sentinel, May 30, 1873.

<sup>14</sup> Montgomery County Sentinel, May 24, 1872.

<sup>15</sup> In April 1855, a committee was formed to pursue an enlarged "Union Protestant" Graveyard, and on February 7, 1860, the Senate of Maryland passed an Act enabling the Church Vestry to hold 15 acres, but no further mention of enlargement occurs at that time. The cemetery was never known as the Rockville Union Cemetery, despite some references to it by that name. Union in this context meant non-denominational.

<sup>16</sup> Sentinel October 18, 1889.

<sup>17</sup> Obituary of R. T. Veirs, January 18, 1918.

<sup>18</sup> David Charles Sloane, The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 64-156.

<sup>19</sup> Land Records 558/319 and 578/312.





Aerial View of Rockville Cemetery located in the top half of the view. The oldest portion of the cemetery is outlined in black. A strip to the left is owned by the City of Rockville and follows the course of Little Falls Branch. The newer portion of the cemetery is on the right. The half-circle road accesses Baltimore Road.

To the west of the cemetery is Avery Road and “Glen View,” the Rockville Civic Center.

Attachment A

**Chronology of Building Program – Prince George’s Parish**

Rock Creek Church (Georgetown) later St. Paul’s

Rock Creek Chapel (Rockville)

1719 - Subscriptions to build a chapel on part of Capt. Bealls land at the mouth of Rock Creek.

1725 - Repairs to Chapel

1726 - Contract for a Vestry House, 16 X 12 feet overjettied, with inside chimneys, 8 foot (roof) pitch, to put floor in Church, engaged George Beall for the work.

1727 - Bingle Page to build 14 pews and a place for clerk to sit.

August, 1728 - Voted 49-26 that Rock Creek would be the Parish Church, but the, minority of 26 began a subscription for a Church in “the upper part of the parish”

1731 - Sent to London for: 5 Casements (windows) 30 X 17 inches long and 5 lights (panes) the same; 10 lights 21 X 17; 2 lights 23 X 11; and surplice.

1733 - Building a pailling (fence) around church with gate.

1733/34 - Contract with Bingle Page and Benjamin Perry to build a gallery with seats, and for 8 "good and substantial new blocks of locust or chestnut to the church" (Path stepping blocks.)

1734 - Sent to London for 6 sash windows 7 X 3 feet long with lines and pulleys...one single light (pane) 3 feet by 18 inches.

1735 - Sent to London for 5 lights of diamond cut glass 5 feet long to be divided in the middle, one half in a casement and the other half fixt.

1737 - Mr. John Chew promised to buy glass for left hand of the Church- will be 76 panes @ 1 shilling 6 pence per.

1738 – Thomas Williams donates 2 acres of “Mill Land” for the building of a chapel.

1739 – Rev. Murdoch paid for recording deed for 2 acres of ground to build a chapel.

1744 - Acts of Assembly, Chapter 2  
(1744) Former Church to be the Parish  
Church.

1744 - Completion of 3 years of  
repairs to church, fence and pews.

1750 - Payment to Church Sexton,  
Richard Peck for 3.

1741 – Sent to London for Bible and Common Prayer  
Book for Chapel.

1743 – Assessment of tobacco per poll toward building a  
new church.

1744 – Acts of Assembly, Chapter 2 (1744). Chapel  
already built to be made a Chapel of Ease, Pringe  
George's Parish.

1748 – Rock Creek Chapel to have services every other  
Sunday in place of Paint Branch Chapel.

1750 – Payment to Chapel Sexton, Susan Beatty for 2.

1750 - John Clagett to build a gallery  
and a reading desk with room for a  
clerk and a pulpit.

1751 - Thomas Nicholls to raile in  
(fence) the Chapel Yard. "Chappell  
Yard to be 100 by 96 feet with 2 gates  
4 feet wide as it is at the Church."

Also to make rail around communion  
table; chancel to be 5 feet wide and 6-  
1/2 feet long and lower to be railed  
10 inches.

1751 - Charles Haymond to "grubb the  
Chapel Yard and clear the trees all out  
of same, to fell all trees for 15 feet  
distant all around the laid railes."

1754 - Simon Nicholls to repair and  
amend Chapel "To make an amendment of  
20 foot square to backside of Chappell;  
to be weatherboarded and planked as  
laid in said Chappell, whole of  
Chappell and Amendment to be shingled  
with good white oak or cypress singles"

Amendment would have windows and  
shutters, pulpit and desh and one door  
to backside



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GEORGETOWN

ROCKVILLE

"One 8 foot square porch to be put on the front, the whole to be underpind with stone."

1754 - Simon Nicholls paid 8,460 Ibs of tobacco.

1755 - Nicholls to raise Chapel 9 inches higher and put up 2 horse blocks.

June, 1761 - Agreement with Nicholas Haymond for work: "5 windows of 18 lights in each, and 1 window above in gallery with 8 lights.

Chapel Yard to be posted with posts 4 feet long, two feet in the ground, 2 feet behind the old post with 3 pins in each post...Three gates to yard to be made good and railes set to rights, if new ones be wanting to be put in place of those that are rotten."

1764 - Robert Owen to build a vestry room "20 X 20 feet, 7 foot 6 inch pitch; planked above and below, planed lop shingles..mantelpiece, back and hearth of stone."

1767 - another 20 foot square addition to the front of the Chapel.

1768 - Rock Creek Church is much deteriorated, pulled down.

1769-1770 - Gallery built in east end and new pews (26) and several private seats to be built.

1771 - Bills in Assembly to petition for new brick and stone church on site of present one.

(No Vestry Minutes/Records 1773-1790)

1774 - Advertisement for contract for new church to be built four miles from Georgetown, between Monocacy and Seneca Church to be 50 feet square, walls of brick 22-1/2 inches thick on first floor, 18 on second, stone foundations, cypress shingle.  
(Location of this Church is not determined.)

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ROCKVILLE

1794 - Chapel in ruinous condition,  
funds to build new one not available.

1802-1808 - Construction of 2-story,  
brick church, Christ Episcopal Church.

1817 - Church unsuitable for worship  
due to inconvenient arrangement and  
poor workmanship.

1820 - Subscription for new church to  
be built on South Washington Street in  
Rockville.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Records of Prince George's Parish, church histories by Ethan Allen (1861), Rev. Wayland (1845) Maude Betts (1975).  
Prince George's, Montgomery and Frederick County Land, will and Plat records. Records of the Rockville Cemetery  
Association; Family histories and genealogies; MHT forms for "Glen View" and Christ Episcopal Church.

Acreage of nominated property: 26/64 acres

Original MHT form prepared by: Anne Cissel (Historian) and J. Christensen (description) for Peerless Rockville,  
October 1986.